

England. — Churches, etc. — Baptists
 THE

KENT AND SUSSEX

ASSOCIATION OF *Particular*

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

CONSISTING of those which meet at *Ashford, Sandhurst, Smarden, Tenterden, Folkstone, Bessell's Green, and Chatham, in KENT; and at Battle, Rye, Rotherfield, Wivelsfield, Lewes, Bright-helmston, and Handcross, in SUSSEX.*

MAINTAINING the important Doctrines of Three equal Persons in the Divine Essence—Eternal, and Personal Election to Holiness here, and Eternal Life hereafter—The original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind—Particular Redemption—Free Justification, by the imputed Righteousness of Christ alone—Efficacious Grace in Regeneration, and the perseverance of the Saints to eternal Glory.

ASSEMBLED AT CHATHAM,

The 4th and 5th Days of June, 1793.

BREVIA TES.

TUESDAY.

THE Messengers of the Churches met at four o'clock:—the 423 Hymn in *Rippon's Selection* was sung;—and Brother *Knott* prayed. The names of the Messengers were then called over, and Brother *Middleton* was chosen Moderator.

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tor, and Brother *Knott*, Scribe. The Moderator read the Preliminaries of the Association, and then called for the Letters of the respective Churches, which were also read; in which it appeared that the Churches at Tenterden and at Smarden were destitute of Pastors.

The Church at *Battle* having avowed the error of *Universal Restoration*, it was agreed that the said Church should be separated from this Association, which was accordingly done.

The Moderator prayed and adjourned the Assembly at five o'clock.

Public worship began at seven o'clock, and was conducted in the following manner:—Sung, *Rippon*, 427.—Brother *Booker* prayed.—Brother *Middleton* preached from *Hab. iii. 2. O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years*.—Sung *Rippon*, 98.—Brother *Copping* concluded in prayer.

A Letter from fifteen persons announcing that they had withdrawn from the Church at *Battle* was read, declaring their disbelief of the Universal Restoration of Devils and Men from Hell, and desiring advice and help of the Associated Churches. Agreed that the Messengers do represent this case to their respective Churches. Adjourned.

W E D N E S D A Y.

THE Messengers met at six o'clock, and the following Brethren engaged in prayer; *Vine, Finn, Pope, and Stace*.

The Circular Letter, which Brother *Knott* had been appointed to draw up, was read, approved, and ordered to be printed for the use of the Churches.

The Moderator concluded, and the Assembly adjourned at Eight o'clock.



Public

Public worship began at half past ten o'clock, and was conducted in the following manner :—Brother *Atwood* read the *first Chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* :—Sung, *Rippon*, 254.—Brother *Atwood* prayed.—Sung, *Watts*, II. 165.—Brother *Purdy* prayed.—Sung, *Watts*, I. 135.—Brother *Copping* preached from *Psal. lxxxvi. 17. Show me a token for good.*—Sung, *Rippon*, 342.—And Brother *Humphrey* concluded in prayer.

It was agreed that the annual *Fast-day* be observed by the Churches in this Association on the first Wednesday in November next, as usual ; and that the *Prayer-meeting* be continued on the first Monday evening in each month, in the ensuing year.

Not having received any letters from the Charleston Association in America, it was agreed that Brother *Middleton* should address a Letter to them in the name of this Association.

This Association heartily approves of *The Particular Baptist Society for propagating the Gospel amongst the Heathen*, instituted by the *Northamptonshire Association*, and will do all in its power to encourage the same.

It was agreed that Brother *Middleton* should write the next Circular Letter, and that an answer to one of the following questions be recommended to him as the subject of it ;—

1. *What are the best evidences of the grace of God in a believer's heart ?*
2. *What is the nature of Christian candor ?*

It was agreed that the next Association be held at *Sandhurst in Kent* ; on the first Tuesday and Wednesday in June,

1794: Accommodations at the *Angel*. Brethren *Knest*, and *Humphrey* to preach ; and, in case of failure, Brethren *Vine*, and *Booker*.

The Moderator concluded in prayer, and dismissed the Assembly, at five o'clock.



In the evening, Brother *Swain*, of *Walworth*, preached a Lecture from *Iſa.* xl. 31.



The State of the Associated Churches of Kent and Sussex,

1793.

[Ministers' names are in *Italic.*]

CHURCHES.	MESSENGERS.	Increase.			Decrease.		
		bpt.	let.	ref.	dsm	exc	dead
ASHFORD, -	No Messengers,	3				1	
RYE, - -	{ <i>Thomas Purdy,</i>						
	{ <i>Edward Pope,</i>						
	{ <i>Richard Davies,</i>					1	4
SANDHURST,	{ <i>William Copping,</i>						
	{ <i>Thomas Moor,</i>						
	{ <i>Eth. Beech,</i>						5
SMARDEN, -	{ <i>John Roots,</i>						
	{ <i>Wm. Clegget,</i>	1				2	3
TENTERDEN, -	{ <i>Sam. E. penett,</i>						
	{ <i>Richard Wood,</i>	1					3
ROTHERFIELD,	No Messengers,					1	2
WIVELSFIELD,	{ <i>Henry Booker,</i>						
	{ <i>Joseph Terry,</i>	8	1				1
	{ <i>William Vidler,</i>						
BATTLE, -	{ <i>William Ashby,</i>						
	{ <i>Steph. Blunden,</i>	8			6	2	6
	{ <i>William Atwood,</i>						
FOLKSTONE,	{ <i>J. Stace, sen.</i>						
	{ <i>George Finn,</i>	7		2		1	
LEWES, -	<i>Joseph Middleton,</i>	17	1		2	1	2
BRIGHTELMSTON,	{ <i>Thomas Vine,</i>						
	{ <i>William Stevens,</i>	14	6			3	
BESSEL'S GREEN,	{ <i>John Stanger,</i>						
	{ <i>Benj. Fletcher,</i>						
	{ <i>Thomas Stanger,</i>						
CHATHAM, -	{ <i>John Knott,</i>						
	{ <i>David Crow,</i>						
	{ <i>John Ackworth,</i>	11				3	1
HANDCROSS, -	{ <i>Thos. Humphrey,</i>						
	{ <i>John Caffyn, sen.</i>	12					1
		82	8	2	8	15	28

Increase 41.

Signed, in behalf of the Assembly, by

JOSEPH MIDDLETON, MODERATOR.

The

The CIRCULAR LETTER.

BELOVED BRETHREN,

THE subject proposed at our last Annual Meeting to be treated of in our Letter to the Churches this year, was,

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

A subject, the consideration of which we judge feasible, and we hope, through the Divine Blessing, may be profitable.

We shall, therefore, briefly enquire,

1. What is really the present state of Things ?
2. What we may reasonably expect to be about to take place ?
3. What are the especial duties which are consequently incumbent on the Churches and People of God ?—

We request your candid and serious attention, whilst we state, First, What we judge to be really the present state of things.

And here, we do not mean to enter on a discussion of the political state of the world at large, or of these kingdoms in particular: We apprehend that subject to be foreign to our business, and think that eager discussion of subjects of that nature, injures, rather than serves the interest of vital Godliness. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves to the state of things with respect to real religion.

Respecting the world at large, a great part of it lies in the most gross darkness; involved in Popery, Mahometanism, or Paganism, without the light of Divine Revelation, and in those

those countries which are indulged with that light, and where the errors of the Church of Rome have been protested against, even there Atheism, Infidelity, and the most gross Profanity much prevail. Our own country is deeply involved in the general charge—May the Lord revive his work in the midst of the years ! and give unto his Son the Heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession !

But, more particularly, with respect to the visible churches of Christ.—On the one hand, we observe, that the Gospel is extensively preached, that the number of professors is large, and that in the churches of our own denomination, the number of members has been, on the whole, for some years past, considerably on the increase : yet we cannot but say on the other, that we fear, that with respect to vital religion, it is but a day of small things. We would, brethren, notice to you some things, which appear to us, to furnish matter for lamentation and alarm.

First, There has been, and is a considerable declension from Evangelical truth. Doctrines have been propagated, and by many received, derogatory to the sovereignty of Divine Grace—to the dignity of the Person of Christ—to the efficacy of His death, as an atoning sacrifice for sin—to the work of the Holy Spirit, as the Sanctifier of the elect—and to the interests of practical Godliness.

We would particularly specify—*Sabellianism*, or a denial of the distinct personality of the Sacred Three, in the One Divine Essence—this militates against the scriptural doctrine of a personal union of the divine and human natures in our Immanuel, is as derogatory to the real divinity of his Person as Socinianism itself, and strikes at the very root of his proper satisfaction for sin.

The

The doctrine of *Universal Restoration*, or the ultimate salvation of all, even of those who dying in impenitence and unbelief, go to Hell, and of the Devils themselves;—a doctrine contrary to the sovereignty of Divine Grace in the salvation of men—to the efficacy of the death of Christ—to the work of the Holy Spirit, attributing to the torments of Hell, that which could only be effected by Him; and detrimental to the interests of practical Godliness, as it encourages light thoughts of sin, and tends to destroy that holy awe which the just threatenings of eternal wrath are calculated to inspire.

The notion of believers *being delivered from the law as a rule of moral conduct*, is contrary, we apprehend, to the testimony of God in his word, *Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10. Jas. ii. 8.* tending to pull down the certain and eternal standard of right and wrong, and to encourage a practical disregard to holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

We would also notice the notion of the *innocence of mental error*, which leads to an indifference for Divine Truth, directly opposite to the scriptural exhortations of standing fast in, and earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the Saints. These things, we think it proper to notice, as alarming symptoms of a declension from the truth, as it is in Jesus.

Secondly, We fear that *holy zeal* is but at a very low ebb—what a fervent zeal for God, for truth, for holiness, and for Zion, has actuated, many of the servants of God, in times past—zealously affected in a good cause, bonds and imprisonments, yea death itself, moved them not. Intent on their course, they have, with noble ardor pressed through all opposition, triumphing still in their all-sufficient head. See *Abs. xx. 23, 24. Heb. xi. 36, 39.*

But

But how little of this spirit is there to be seen now ! Alas, a stupid indifference and abominable luke-warmness, seem almost universally to prevail amongst professors. May the Lord deeply convince us of the evil, and revive our almost expiring zeal !

Thirdly, We cannot but notice the lamentable want of *brotherly love*.

This is, by our Lord himself, specified as the distinguishing badge of real discipleship. "By this shall men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have love towards one another," agreeably with which, the beloved disciple saith, "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren : he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death," 1 *Job*. iii. 14. This abundantly prevailed in the Primitive Church. See *Acts*. ii. 41, to the end. But, alas, how little of this spirit is there in the present day ! What bickerings and backbitings ; what ungodly contentions and strife, and that frequently about the veriest trifles, disorder and disgrace many of the visible churches of Christ—Brethren, these things ought not to be so. "Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work," *James* iii. 16.

Fourthly, The things already mentioned, have produced, and are producing many melancholy effects, such as *loosening the bonds of christian fellowship, a neglect of social prayer, a contempt of church discipline, and in many cases, a neglect of the public ordinances of the Lord of Zion, or slothfulness in attendance thereon*. The compass of our Letter will not permit us to enlarge on these evils, as we otherwise might. We earnestly beg that you would seriously think of them—examine yourselves with respect to these things, and watch and pray for their removal, both in yourselves and others.

Fifthly, We think it our duty, to remark the prevalence of a sinful *conformity to the world* in its vicious and vain courses. "Be not conformed to this world," is the injunction of one Apostle. "The friendship of the world, is enmity with God; whosoever, therefore, will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God," is the declaration of another. And our Lord himself, speaking of his Disciples, says, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." But how little of this distinction is there apparent at present—what a conformity to the vain customs and maxims of a wicked world! How obscured is the glory of the present professed churches of Jesus Christ! God hath been pleased to indulge us with a period of temporal ease, in an exemption from violent persecution; and we, ungrateful wretches! have grown full and forgot God; forgot too, our peculiar character as christians, and have sunk into the spirit of the world!

Lastly, We fear that *a resting in a bare notional acquaintance with gospel doctrines*, and *a mere formal attendance on the externals of religion*, do awfully prevail in many, who are perhaps on these accounts saying, "I am rich and increased with goods," when, alas! the very reverse is their real state.

Secondly, If these things are indeed so, what may we reasonably expect will follow?

We would be far from limiting the Holy One of Israel, and should, we trust, most heartily rejoice in the speedy accomplishment of the glorious things spoken of the city of God. Yet we cannot but, in faithfulness, say, that we fear the present state of the churches of Christ is not such as forebodes good, but the contrary.

Have we not reason to fear?

First,

First, A still greater withdrawal of the presence and blessing of God from the ordinances of his house?—Have we not reason to lament the want of frequent, deep awakenings under the Word, and of comfortable melting seasons in our religious Assemblies? We have under the influence of a slothful spirit, treated the Lord with shameful neglect; and have we just cause to wonder if he hath in measure withdrawn himself from us? Or to complain of him, if he should withdraw himself further still? If we should experience an awful fulfilment of that threatening, “They shall go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord: but they shall not find him, he hath withdrawn himself from them.” *Hosea* v. 6. See also *Song of Sol.* v. 2. 6.

Secondly, A removal of ordinances themselves.

The heavenly manna hath been loathed by many—what if a just God should take it away, and send a famine in the land, “not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.” *Amos*, viii. 11, 12. He hath, thus dealt with other churches mentioned in his Word, where similar declensions have prevailed—their candlestick he hath removed out of its place. *Rev.* ii. 5, &c.

Perhaps some of the prophetic parts of the Word of God considered in connection with the above view of things, may justly strengthen our apprehensions. It should seem, that prior to the utter downfall of mystical Babylon, (the Church of Rome) she will yet recover her former splendor, so as to say, “I fit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.” *Rev.* xviii. 17. And the prophecy of the death of the witnesses, that is, Gospel Ministers, bearing testimony to the truth lying unburied for the space of three years and an half, (in prophetic stile, three days and an half, *Rev.* xi. 9.) does not appear to have been yet accomplished—and if so, the death of the witnesses, or general silencing of

Gospel Ministers for the above space of time, is an event that is yet to take place, and may be, perhaps, much nearer than many think of. We do not take upon us, Brethren, to speak decisively on the subject—nor is it our wish to amuse you, with curious conjectures, or alarm you with groundless fears—but we seriously think, that the present state of the churches, and dispensations of Divine Providence, together with some parts of sacred prophecy, do call for very serious attention.

Thirdly, *The approach of some winnowing trying time*—which will be made use of to separate the chaff from the wheat—to make manifest hypocrites, and to purge and enliven real Christians! Sunk into a worldly spirit, and settled on the lees of formality as the generality of professors are—have we not reason to expect, that “the Lord will search our Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their hearts, the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” *Zeph. i. 12.*

We proceed, Thirdly, to say what we apprehend to be the special duties the season calls for.

And, First, *for deep humiliation before God.*

A consideration of the unnumbered mercies we have enjoyed—of the many means of spiritual improvement we have been indulged with; and of the long suffering goodness of God towards us: together with our ingratitude, forgetfulness of God, and indolence respecting the best and most important things, loudly call for this. Have we not reason, with the deepest abasement of soul to say, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” *Isa. lxiv. 6.* Special revivals of religion, have usually

usually been preceded by seasons of deep humiliation, *Jer.* xxxi. 18, 21. Did we see much of this spirit prevail, we should esteem it a token for good.

Secondly, We would call your attention to our Lord's exhortation to the Church in Sardis, *Rev.* iii. 2, 3. "*Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God.*" The Sardian Church has been by able commentators considered as descriptive of the state of things in the church, from the reformation, down to the spiritual reign of Christ; near the end of that state we probably are—by us, therefore, the exhortation should be particularly regarded.

Let us then, in the strength of the Lord, "be watchful" against error, against formality, against carnality, against worldly-mindedness; against, in short, whatever is contrary to the simplicity of the Gospel—the prosperity of Zion—the peace and comfort of our own souls—or the declarative glory of the great head of the Church—and strengthen the things which remain, which are ready to die; such as a zealous attachment to truth—the lively exercise of grace, and a steady vigorous pursuit of practical godliness. "Remembering how we have received and heard, and hold fast and repent." Regarding with holy awe, the threatening which follows, "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief in the night, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee."

Lastly, We earnestly recommend *fervent and frequent prayer*.—Is there not reason to complain of the want of a spirit of prayer in the churches, and that, comparatively, "there is none that stirreth up himself to take hold of God?" *Isa.* lxiv. 7.

May

May the Lord pour out upon his churches, the spirit of grace and supplication! He heareth prayer—the fulfilment of Divine Promises respecting the prosperity of Zion, is connected with prayer. “Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them: I will increase them with men as a flock,” *Ezek.* xxxvi. 37. Brethren, let us be frequent and fervent in private prayer. Diligent in our attendance also on social and public prayer, “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is,”—at all times, let us earnestly remember Zion, praying for the peace of Jerusalem, and the prosperity of those that love her. We have encouragement to pray in hope—our God hath never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain—and however low we may be fallen, or dark present prospects may be, yet Divine Promises shall certainly, in due time, be fulfilled. “For thus saith the Lord, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles as a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her fides, and dandled upon her knees.” *Isa.* lxvi. 12. May the Lord grant a speedy accomplishment of this and similar promises, for the glory of his name, and the comfort of his mourning people!

Brethren, we commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified!

Signed in behalf of the whole, by



JOHN KNOTT.